

[00:00:00] **Laurel:** Hi, everybody. Welcome to Sapphic Culture Club, where we explore lesbian themes in film, TV, books, music, and anywhere else sapphics roam. We're your hosts. I'm Laurel Hechanova.

[00:00:14] **Audrey:** And I'm Audrey Nieh and welcome back to our top 10 list of lesbian films. Today, we are diving surgical gloves deep into the sixth film on the list. Alice Wu's *Saving Face*, and helping us explore this mid-200s classic sapphic meet-cute drama romcom is real life sapphic and cohost of my co-host, Isabel. Welcome, Isabel.

[00:00:49] **Isabel:** Thank you. I kind of invited myself onto this episode, so you're welcome.

Laurel: No way! Did you?

[00:00:59] **Isabel:** I did! I was like, did you talk about this yet? Can...I talk about it? Yeah.

[00:01:00] **Laurel:** I think it was already the plan that you were going to talk with us about this. So that worked out really well. For those of you who do not know, Isabel is Audrey's co-host's co-host so my co-host on our other podcast, Working Classy, which is a show about...well, it's actually changed a lot since the pandemic, but, we will be starting our Season 3 shortly.

We've got a few episodes in the queue already, so be on the lookout for that. And actually I'm gonna toss this question to Isabel. How do we know each other?

[00:01:32] **Isabel:** Oh, we met in...2007? Or '08?

[00:01:38] **Laurel:** I was gonna say 2007, yeah.

[00:01:39] **Isabel:** Around there. Yeah, you knew my brother, I think.

[00:01:44] **Laurel:** I worked down the street from your brother for a while.

[00:01:47] **Isabel:** Yeah. My brother had a crush on you at one point.

[00:01:50] **Audrey:** Aw.

[00:01:53] **Isabel:** And then he was like, "Oh, it's fine."

[00:01:56] **Laurel:** "But you should be my sister." Because was like I'm a gay, and he's like, "Oh my sister's a gay!" So that worked out really well.

[00:02:05] **Isabel:** Kind of. Sure. Yeah.

[00:02:06] **Audrey:** Whoa, whoa, whoa.

[00:02:08] **Laurel:** Wait, hold on a second.

[00:02:10] **Audrey:** There's something you don't know.

[00:02:13] **Isabel:** Yeah, we've been friends since then. And in Chicago.

[00:02:18] **Laurel:** And now your brother has two children, and everything's great.

[00:02:21] **Isabel:** Yes.

[00:02:22] **Laurel:** OK, great.

[00:02:23] **Audrey:** Everything worked out for everyone. Isabel, I'm curious. What is your relationship to this movie? Why are you the perfect person to come on and talk about it?

[00:02:33] **Isabel:** I'm Chinese American.

[00:02:34] **Audrey:** Okay, enough said.

[00:02:35] **Isabel:** I feel like I got that in the bag. It was the first movie that I saw representation without knowing I needed representation, you know, like nowadays everyone talks about, oh, I'd like to see more of this or. Back then I didn't even think it was an option, so I didn't seek out anything. And the first time I watched it was with my brother.

[00:02:59] **Audrey:** Oh.

[00:03:00] **Isabel:** Surprisingly enough, and I don't even think I was out to him at the time.

[00:03:05] **Audrey:** Wow. Okay. We'll have to get into that a little bit more when we dive surgical gloves deep. But before that...

[00:03:13] **Laurel:** So we've got some disclaimers before we jump in. Obviously we're gonna be talking about the movie in its entirety, so spoilers all around. You can watch *Saving Face* on Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Google Play, or Vudu. If you haven't seen it. If you haven't seen it, please pause the podcast and watch it and come back.

[00:03:33] **Audrey:** So before we dive in, um, some stuff about the movie, it was released in 2004. Written and directed by Alice Wu. This was actually her feature length debut. It's also supposedly the first Hollywood movie that centered on Chinese Americans since *Joy Luck Club*, which came out about a decade before. And that is totally bonkers to me.

[00:03:56] **Laurel:** And it makes a cameo.

[00:03:57] **Audrey:** *Joy Luck Club*?

[00:03:58] **Laurel:** Yeah, cause her mom is in the video store and she's like "Do you have Chinese movies?"

[00:04:02] **Audrey:** Oh, that's right.

[00:04:02] **Laurel:** And then she's scanning. And then there's like *Joy Luck Club*.

[00:04:07] **Audrey:** Right, right. That was a great little Easter egg-y scene. Alice Wu, as you probably know, also wrote and directed the 2020 Netflix film, *The Half of It*, which I think I've

seen referred to as the spiritual follow-up to *Saving Face*. And I believe she has described *Saving Face* as a love letter to her mom.

The film is, strangely, produced by Will Smith. I don't know.

[00:04:31] **Laurel:** I had to double check. I was like, is it another Will Smith?

[00:04:33] **Audrey:** I was like, maybe it's a different—yeah, it's a pretty common name.

[00:04:36] **Laurel:** It's like, nope, it's that one.

[00:04:38] **Audrey:** I think he had a production company that was funding smaller films, and this was one of them.

[00:04:42] **Laurel:** Cool. Great.

[00:04:43] **Audrey:** So *Saving Face* stars, Michelle Krusiec. [*KRU-sik*]? I think that's how you pronounce it. Who I believe is best known for this film. Otherwise she's done a bunch of TV work, including *General Hospital* voiced a bunch of characters on *American Dad*. She was also in *Hawaii Five-O*. And then recently she played Anna Mae Wong in Ryan Murphy's *Hollywood*.

And then Lynn Chen, who plays Vivian is also probably best known for *Saving Face*, but also a bunch of TV work too, including this show that I've never heard of called *Nice Girls Crew*, which Michelle was also in.

I don't know if I've either of you even seen this or heard of it.

[00:05:21] **Laurel:** I haven't, but Alli started watching that after this, and she really likes it.

[00:05:24] **Audrey:** Really?

[00:05:25] **Laurel:** Mm-hmm

[00:05:26] **Audrey:** I'll just check it out. Lynn was also is, or was most recently in *Grey's Anatomy*, which I guess is still on? I had no idea.

[00:05:35] **Laurel:** I know.

[00:05:35] **Audrey:** And of course you plays a doctor, cuz I think at some point in your career, if you were an Asian actor, you probably play a doctor.

[00:05:41] **Laurel:** Okay, wait on that. So Joan Chen, who we'll get to you next has played two doctors. Lynn Chen has played three doctors and one nurse.

[00:05:51] **Audrey:** Yes.

[00:05:52] **Laurel:** Michelle Krusiec has played six doctors—at least six doctors and one nurse. Yeah.

[00:05:59] **Audrey:** Are you kidding me? I'm really impressed that you have this tally.

[00:06:02] **Laurel:** Well, I started so as I was going through their IMDBs, I was like, this one was like, you know, Dr. Chen, Dr. this Dr. that. And I was like, wait a second. And then I started going through the rest of them. And then I started doing a search for the keyword and it showed up.

So Michelle Krusiec is the most doctorly of the three, but they've all played doctors.

[00:06:24] **Audrey:** Wow. I don't know what to say about that. I feel like that could be its own episode. If we were called like Sapphic Asian Club or something.

[00:06:33] **Laurel:** This is basically Sapphic Asian Club right here.

[00:06:35] **Audrey:** It is today for sure, yeah. I guess it always is, actually.

[00:06:38] **Laurel:** It kind of is, yeah.

[00:06:40] **Audrey:** Okay. And then of course we have Joan Chen who plays Wil's mom. Joan Chen is an actor, writer, director. You probably know her from the *Last Emperor*, *Twin Peaks*, of course, *Heaven and Earth*. She also directed and co-wrote *Xiu Xiu the Sent Down Girl*, and let's not forget she directed *Autumn in New York*, starring Winona Ryder. Just had to throw that in there.

I saw this quote—this is in Wikipedia—Joan Chen said about this film: “I was always this tragic woman and Alice gave me this opportunity to play in a comedy. In a lot of the movies that I did before *Saving Face*, I had a dark period where I played a lot of awful roles in films, like *On Deadly Ground* and *Judge Dredd*, but I really felt like I wasn't being authentic. And so *Saving Face* came along and gave me the opportunity to get the authenticity that I was craving for.”

And I wanted to mention this because it reminded me of some quotes I've seen from Michelle Yeoh about her role in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, because she's typically known for playing, like, kind of this like stern mother role or, like, obviously a very badass woman.

But, um, I think getting to play this comedic role in this film was one of the first opportunities she had.

[00:07:45] **Laurel:** That's super cool. I was wondering how Joan Chen felt about this role, because...so, it's been a long time since I've seen this. It's been at least several years since my second—I think I've seen this like three times now, but I forgot that Joan Chen played the mother. So when she first comes on screen, I'm like, wait, who...who is she?

Cause she doesn't look nearly old enough to be...

[00:08:10] **Audrey:** She looks like her own daughter's age.

[00:08:13] **Laurel:** Yeah, they look the same age. And so I was so confused for like the first 10 minutes of the film and then even their ages in real life. Like she was born in '70...? They're like 13 years apart or something.

[00:08:25] **Audrey:** Oh, of course.

[00:08:26] **Laurel:** Yeah. So I think it was probably just a treat to be able to get Joan Chen because she was amazing. But then I was like, it feels like a little bit of a stretch for this person to be playing Wil's mom, you know?

So I don't know. And they didn't even say like, oh, I had her as a teenager or something, which would've made more sense, but...so I'm glad she enjoyed the role.

[00:08:46] **Audrey:** Well, I think the mother is supposed to be 48. They make a big deal outta that, right? Cuz she's pregnant.

[00:08:51] **Laurel:** Pregnant, yeah.

[00:08:52] **Audrey:** Then I think that Michelle's character Wil, is in her like mid-20s?

[00:08:57] **Laurel:** Late 20s. I think she's like 27...

Isabel: I think she's supposed to be like 28.

[00:08:58] **Audrey:** 28? Okay. So she had her when she was like 20, which is probably like a reasonable...

[00:09:01] **Laurel:** Someone said, "It was just your mom and you for 20 years" or something at some point. Someone's line. But, yeah. So let's talk a little bit about where it takes place. It takes place in New York, between Flushing, Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. And it features the New York City Chinese American community.

So on Amazon, it lists the languages as being Mandarin and Shanghainese when do they speak Shanghainese?

[00:09:30] **Audrey:** I think the, um, the sort of mahjong ladies toss it back and forth a little bit if I remember correctly, but it's mostly Mandarin.

[00:09:38] **Laurel:** Okay. Yeah, I was just curious. All right. But the premise—this is from Google. So Wil, who's played by Michelle [*KRU-shik*]...[*KRU-sik*]?

[00:09:46] **Audrey:** [*KRU-zik*]

[00:09:47] **Laurel:** I'm gonna—for the whole episode, it's gonna be [*KRU-shik*]? [*KRU-sik*]? [*KRU-zik*].

[00:09:50] **Audrey:** It's hard.

[00:09:51] **Laurel:** Wil (Michelle Krusiec) is a lesbian, but she not dare tell her widowed mother, Hwei-lan (Joan Chen), or her very traditional grandparents. She's shocked, however, to find out she's not the only one in her family with romantic secrets when she learns that her 48-year-old mother is pregnant. Unwilling to reveal who the father is, Hwei-lan is kicked out of her parents' home and must move in with Wil, which puts a strain on Wil's budding relationship with openly gay Vivian (Lynn Chen).

It got an 87% on Rotten Tomatoes. What else was out at the time? Lesbian films that were out at the time include *Monster*, which came out in 2003 *D.E.B.S.*, which was 2004. In the same year we got *My Summer of Love*, *Wild Things 2*.

[00:10:35] **Audrey:** I don't know if that counts.

[00:10:35] **Laurel:** And then in not lesbian films, we got *Shrek 2*, *Spider-Man 2*, *The Passion of the Christ*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and *The Incredibles*.

I wonder how many of these of the films on the list came out either around the same time as a Marvel movie or a Harry Potter movie. It feels like more and more each time.

[00:10:58] **Audrey:** Yeah. Yeah. So we're in the Spider-Man...this is like the Toby McGuire Spider-Man era, probably, so it's probably pre-MCU explosion.

[00:11:08] **Laurel:** Yeah. Oh, this might still be, is that like a Sony Spider-Man...it doesn't matter. Anyway.

[00:11:12] **Audrey:** Mm-hmm. Yep. So we asked y'all, if you've seen this before, what you thought, and 80% of you have seen it and 20% not. Don't think that's the highest, but pretty close.

[00:11:24] **Laurel:** Really? I thought that was...no?

[00:11:25] **Audrey:** What was *Disobedience*?

[00:11:27] **Laurel:** Oh, easy to find out, right? Yeah.

[00:11:29] **Audrey:** Scrolling down to look...81% to 19%. So, almost. Yep.

[00:11:31] **Laurel:** Okay, close. All right. We also asked if you had seen it when and where did you see it? And we got...from Zoe: "in a class in uni."

[00:11:41] **Audrey:** I wanna know what class it is.

[00:11:43] **Laurel:** I know, yeah.

[00:11:44] **Audrey:** Baby said that she watched it in the theaters in 2004 when it came out.

[00:11:47] **Laurel:** Aiden said "Watched with my mom. At that time, we were exactly like the movie. Everything good now. ❤️" Congratulations. I'm glad.

[00:11:57] **Audrey:** Also a bunch of people watched it streaming very recently, including this week.

[00:12:02] **Laurel:** Great!

[00:12:03] **Audrey:** Other thoughts. We asked you if you have other thoughts. And Zoe also said "As an Asian, I understand the tension between family members. Also the expectation."

[00:12:14] **Laurel:** Baby says, “I love the in-joke when Ma picks up *The Last Emperor* at the video rental place.” Good catch, yeah.

[00:12:19] **Audrey:** Pretty cute, yeah. As we mentioned earlier, Joan Chen was in *The Last Emperor*. I think that was probably like her breakout role in at least in the States.

deepriverontario said, “It’s totally adorable. I don’t normally like romcoms but this one has complexity.”

[00:12:34] **Laurel:** From veiledlightphotofilm, “It was one of the first wlw films I remember that didn’t suck!”

[00:12:43] **Audrey:** And then from strangerworks, she said, “Alice Wu has a wedding interruption fetish.” It is true. There is, I believe, a wedding interruption scene *In the Half of It*.

[00:12:54] **Laurel:** Yep.

[00:12:55] **Audrey:** Hmm!

[00:12:55] **Laurel:** There sure is.

[00:12:56] **Audrey:** You know, whatever your kink is. It’s cool.

[00:12:59] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:13:04] **Audrey:** All right. Isabel, time to grill you.

[00:13:08] **Isabel:** Okay.

[00:13:09] **Audrey:** Just kidding. Everyone, I would love to know if you and your partner have seen this before. If so, when and where?

[00:13:18] **Laurel:** Let’s start with Isabel, yeah.

[00:13:20] **Isabel:** Uh, saw it probably not the first run. The first run, it only came out in like six theaters, but probably thereafter saw it with my brother. Super awkward. Wasn’t out at the time. I actually don’t think I knew what the movie was about. I don’t think I watched a trailer. I think he suggested it cuz he’s very into like Asian/Asian American-led characters. And so he was like, let’s go see it.

Watched it with him. Really enjoyed it. It really surprised me cause he didn’t know what I was getting into. I think. And then later that year, when I went back home to Hawaii, cuz I was—I think I was in between places. I watched it with my girlfriend at the time because I was like, oh, we need to go watch this. Cuz there’s this movie that kind of, you know, represents us in a way that I haven’t seen. So that was the first time.

[00:14:10] **Laurel:** That’s cool. Was your girlfriend at the time also Asian?

[00:14:14] **Isabel:** Asian? Yes. Not Chinese, though, yeah.

[00:14:17] **Audrey:** I'm really curious if you think now, looking back, if your brother knew what the premise was and if he was, like, subconsciously kind of nudging you towards something.

[00:14:28] **Isabel:** I don't know, that's a good question. I'm not too sure. He's always been supportive, though. Like when I came out to him he was really supportive. So if he had inklings, he did not tell me.

[00:14:39] **Audrey:** Let's bring your brother on the show to ask now.

[00:14:42] **Laurel:** And we have him right here...Ivan!

[00:14:45] **Audrey:** Has Erin, is that your partner's name? Has she seen this before?

[00:14:50] **Isabel:** She has. Yeah. But she is white, so she doesn't connect on the Asian part of it, but she was recommended to watch the movie. And it's probably one of her favorites as well.

[00:15:05] **Audrey:** Aww.

[00:15:05] **Laurel:** Ooh, spoiler. Cool.

[00:15:08] **Audrey:** Laurel. Have you seen this before?

[00:15:11] **Laurel:** I have, yeah. I'm gonna say, I'm pretty sure that I watched it with my first girlfriend who is also Filipino. And I thought it was really sweet at the time. Um, wait...just kidding.

[00:15:28] **Audrey:** Oh, wait a second.

[00:15:29] **Laurel:** 'Cuz it came...I was trying to do the math, and it came out in 2004. So unless it was...an interesting reunion, and we watched it, that couldn't have been possible.

So, no, I guess I must have watched it with Rose, who I was with at the time. And I remember liking it the first time, definitely. But then I, I revisited it several years after that and I remember feeling it was kind of cheesy and then on this rewatch, my opinion changed. So we will get into that more later.

Alli has also seen this before. I don't remember where or when though. But I have her rating for later, so we can talk about it later.

[00:16:14] **Audrey:** Okay.

[00:16:16] **Laurel:** Audrey. How about you?

[00:16:18] **Audrey:** I thought you'd never ask. I have seen it before. I saw it at Sundance when it came out in...I think it must have been 2004, and I actually saw it with my first girlfriend, but I don't know if we were together at the time. I can't remember cuz we were on and off for several years. I don't think we were actually together.

And Heather had not seen it until we watched it this week for this episode.

[00:16:44] **Laurel:** Oh, wow. Okay.

[00:16:45] **Audrey:** Heather is also white. My first impression I'm embarrassed to say, but the first time I watched it, I really didn't like it. Uh, I think I wasn't ready for it. I think I was, like, simultaneously waiting for something like this, but also not ready for it.

I probably was dealing with, like, a lot of internalized self-racism or something and the representation was almost too much for me. There's a lot about it that I think I relate to. And that's probably why it was, like, so uncomfortable for me. And then I think I watched it like maybe one more time between then and now still didn't love it, watched it last week and was like, did like a total 180.

[00:17:23] **Laurel:** Uh-huh.

[00:17:24] **Audrey:** I think now I'm ready for it. 20 years later.

[00:17:29] **Laurel:** I do sort of wonder if it's like...sometimes when I, or at least the first few times I watched it, I had that feeling that it's sort of like when you're out with like your family and your family is, like, too much themselves and it's like, "Ugh, I don't need you to be like yourself in public!" or something.

And it's this terrible way to feel embarrassed. But yeah, I feel like in that way, I wasn't ready as well, the first couple of times I watched it. And maybe because you were in a theater, it, it also felt sort of amplified, you know?

[00:17:59] **Audrey:** Oh, yeah. I don't know. I felt like, I mean, no one was looking at me, but I felt like everyone was looking me?

[00:18:04] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:18:05] **Audrey:** I felt so exposed by this film. I remember I was literally melting down my seat. Like at one point I wasn't sitting on my seat anymore because I was so uncomfortable, and I couldn't do anything. Like I was crawling out of my skin. Definitely watching it at home was a little better for me this time.

[00:18:19] **Laurel:** I think we can get into that a little bit when we get into our Top 3s, but do you wanna get into, when does it get gay?

[00:18:27] **Audrey:** In terms of, like, literally gay there's some gay looks about five minutes in, you know, when they first meet each other.

[00:18:34] **Laurel:** At Planet China? Yes.

[00:18:35] **Audrey:** Planet China. Yes. Oh man. We should make an immersive experience called Planet China.

And then it gets *real* gay about 30 minutes in—I guess their first kiss, which was cute. Like it was the scene where Wil was practicing falling, right? Vivian was showing her how to fake fall. And then they both fall, and there's like a smooching happening.

[00:19:00] **Laurel:** It's very cute. Yeah. Yeah. And both of them are like, I feel like Alice Wu really loves her awkward Asians, right? Like both of those moments are like gay panic moments. Like when Wil catches Vivian looking at her at planet China, she's like, [gasps] and she turns around immediately.

And then when they're practicing falling, Vivian's like, "Just let yourself go. Let yourself go." And she's like, "Fall. Fall." And Wil's not falling. And so she creeps up closer to her, right? And she holds her hands, and then she gets really, really close and Wil's like, "Oh my God." And she literally falls over. It's very cute. But also like gay panic over and over and over.

[00:19:42] **Audrey:** She literally collapsed.

[00:19:42] **Laurel:** Yeah. do we wanna get into our top three moments that you didn't love, but would like to discuss.

[00:19:53] **Audrey:** Yes.

[00:19:53] **Laurel:** Isabel, let's start with you.

[00:19:54] **Isabel:** The airport scene.

[00:19:58] **Audrey:** Ooh, going all the way to the end!

[00:20:00] **Laurel:** I know, right?

[00:20:01] **Isabel:** It actually really hit home in the tunnel where she tests her, and she's like, "Kiss me in front of everybody." As I had mentioned, I was not out at the time. Neither was my partner. So, it was one of those like, oh, there's people still testing these things as adults? I don't know.

[00:20:18] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:20:18] **Isabel:** Yeah, I felt it was really heavy and realistic in terms of, you know, throughout the whole movie that Wil didn't wanna come out, so...

[00:20:29] **Laurel:** It was tough to watch. I think one of my pet peeves, especially in gay films is waiting for newly gay characters or people who are trying to come out, and you're just like waiting for them to finally like be themselves. And it usually takes, like, the whole movie for them to figure it out.

And that entire time up until basically the end is just this... I think because maybe it's because I've seen so many stories like that, that I'm sort of tired of the, I guess, that narrative. Yeah, it's really frustrating to see Wil in this very pivotal moment, not be able to kiss the woman she loves.

I mean, like I know that it's part of the conflict and that's, it's what drives the story forward, but it's just like, ah, you know, the 12th movie that I've seen where this is the kind of conflict that it is, but this was 2004, too. So I have to cut it a lot of slack.

[00:21:25] **Audrey:** Yeah, you have a really good point though. Cause I feel like that literally is the story. Like, there's no story without it, right?

[00:21:33] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:21:33] **Audrey:** It is interesting though, because Alice Wu obviously made the decision to do two parallel stories with both of these things happening at once where they're both struggling in similar ways.

So I feel like, in a way, Joan Chen's story is a little bit easier as a non-gay person to digest, you know? It's like a release from the tension of the gay plot.

[00:21:57] **Laurel:** It's also not a typical storyline. And I guess at the time, neither was the like coming out storyline.

[00:22:03] **Audrey:** Oh, that's true.

[00:22:04] **Laurel:** But, I guess, Joan Chen's storyline felt a little bit more novel, you know, it's like, whoa, she's an older pregnant woman who's in love with a younger man who's like trying to get married off by her dad. That's you know, literally, how many other films is that the plot for? Whereas the coming out thing is like, you know, like half of gay films, maybe, maybe more?

[00:22:26] **Audrey:** Oh, oh my god. More up at least up until a certain point.

[00:22:29] **Isabel:** Most of them, yeah.

[00:22:29] **Laurel:** Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Audrey, how about you? What's one of yours?

[00:22:34] **Audrey:** One of mine is—why do I keep bringing this up? But like the music immediately...it's like a dumb thing, but right away, I was very distracted by it because I felt like it was sort of vaguely reminiscent of *Amélie* and vaguely Parisian? So I think the idea was like, oh, romcom, New York, accordions...

[00:22:57] **Laurel:** Right. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:22:58] **Audrey:** You know, I was like, I don't know. I mean, I have a hard time with romcoms in general, so I think it doesn't help when the music is like that. So that's just a little baby one of—a little nugget of mine. What about you?

[00:23:10] **Laurel:** I didn't really...

[00:23:11] **Audrey:** Didn't bother you?

[00:23:12] **Laurel:** Yeah, it didn't, or it didn't catch my attention enough to bother me. Yeah. although I will say that like Wil's pager ringtone going off was very like—whatever song that was was, um, not my favorite.

[00:23:26] **Audrey:** That was so 2004.

[00:23:29] **Laurel:** One of mine would be the casual racism—the mom’s casual racism.

[00:23:33] **Audrey:** Oh, that’s a big one for me. Yeah, for sure.

[00:23:36] **Laurel:** Yeah, I was just like...oh man, like, I get that she’s like old country, but whew, man.

[00:23:40] **Isabel:** It is oddly accurate, you know?

[00:23:44] **Laurel:** I know, I know.

[00:23:45] **Isabel:** I think how harsh it was is very likely.

[00:23:49] **Audrey:** That’s very true. Like, I’ve definitely experienced, you know, identical racism from people in my direct family even recently. But I, I think for me, it extends even beyond the mother. I feel like as part of the story, personally, I feel like the Black friend was tokenized. So I think like on that level it was a little, that’s probably one of my big criticisms of the film.

[00:24:12] **Laurel:** Yeah, like...they had a Black character! You know, that was nice. But then yes, definitely tokenized.

[00:24:19] **Audrey:** Sure. He served a purpose, you know.

[00:24:22] **Laurel:** Right, right, right.

[00:24:23] **Audrey:** Unfortunately, but yeah.

[00:24:24] **Laurel:** Also side note with that character, like joy luck club, there was a “Oh, this meal just needs more soy sauce” scene says the American, you know? And it’s also a gross affront to the person who cooked it, again. And I wonder if that was a callback to *Joy Luck Club*.

[00:24:43] **Audrey:** It’s possible, but it’s also something I’ve personally witnessed. Like when having friends over when I was a kid and them putting soy sauce in the rice and my my mom being like [*grumbles*] you know, so...

[00:24:56] **Laurel:** Isabel, well, do you have?

[00:24:57] **Audrey:** Do you have more, was that your only sort of negative comment?

[00:25:01] **Isabel:** No, I don’t, I don’t think I have anything else that stands out.

[00:25:04] **Laurel:** Ooh, interesting.

[00:25:05] **Audrey:** That’s great.

[00:25:06] **Isabel:** I feel like I have this weird love for this movie.

[00:25:10] **Laurel:** It is not weird.

[00:25:11] **Isabel:** I'm like so attached to it. It's hard for me to kind of step back and judge it in that way.

[00:25:17] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:25:18] **Audrey:** I think that's great.

[00:25:18] **Laurel:** No, I love it.

[00:25:20] **Audrey:** Yeah, when we had our friend Heather Petrocelli on to talk about *Bound*, and she was like, I have literally nothing negative I would say about this film. And I really appreciate that. Cuz obviously you're here because you love the film, you know?

[00:25:35] **Laurel:** And it's like, how rare to have a film like that in your life? How wonderful.

[00:25:38] **Audrey:** Oh, very rare. Meanwhile, we're just gonna destroy it.

[00:25:42] **Laurel:** Yeah. So sit back and...

[00:25:45] **Audrey:** Why don't we quickly go through ours. Go, go ahead. They might overlap too, so...

[00:25:50] **Laurel:** Okay. So maybe I only actually have one more. I have one that isn't like a, a thumbs down kind of thing. It's just sort of a *hmm*. I'll start with that one.

So there are two scenes where Wil, is like practicing excellent dental hygiene? Which I thought was interesting. Like she's talking to her coworker and scraping her tongue?

[00:26:09] **Isabel:** Yes.

[00:26:09] **Laurel:** And then there's like another scene where she's like talking to her mom and flossing?

And I was like, oh, what is this? Like, why? This seems like a very deliberate choice, but like, is it just to emphasize that the character is very Type A, I guess? I don't know.

So that was like one of my very, very minor ones. Okay, I'll do another minor one. And then if you've got another one.

So, there was the joke about the bald guy—him being like short and bald that I didn't really like.

[00:26:38] **Audrey:** Oh, yeah.

[00:26:39] **Laurel:** Wil was dancing with her friend, and he's like, "So who are they setting you up with this time?" And she was like, "Oh, I think it's shorty over there." So like, *bing!* That was one.

And then he says, "Oh, I think he's a stock trader or something." And she's like, "I hope he has stock in Rogaine." It was like, ahhh *whomp whomp*. This is not necessary.

[00:26:59] **Audrey:** This is back in 2004 when body shaming was more okay, I guess, and before short kings became a thing.

[00:27:08] **Laurel:** Yeah, what do you have?

[00:27:08] **Audrey:** I thought you were gonna say something else entirely, but I actually did note the weird hygiene thing too, when she was scraping her tongue. I was like, what? Why? Like, I don't know. I was just kind of uncomfortable.

[00:27:17] **Laurel:** It's a lesbian thing.

[00:27:17] **Audrey:** I loved it, but...

[00:27:18] **Isabel:** She wasn't even doing it right.

[00:27:19] **Audrey:** Oh yeah.

[00:27:22] **Isabel:** She was like patting her tongue. It just...

[00:27:27] **Laurel:** No! You got to get in there!

Isabel: Right!

[00:27:29] **Audrey:** I don't think she was really loosely based on Alice Wu, but I do wonder if that's like a little quirk of hers or something that she—not quirk. Like, nothing wrong with scraping her tongue. Do whatever you want. Just don't show it to me.

Uh, let's see. Little ones, uh...

[00:27:45] **Laurel:** We can get into bigger ones if you got 'em.

[00:27:47] **Audrey:** Everything's kind of bigger for me. This may be little, like, I was kind of bummed that they killed the grandma. Like I know that

Laurel: I know!

Isabel: Yeah.

Audrey: I get it as like a sort of storytelling device, like a plot device, but...meh.

[00:27:59] **Laurel:** Was that a thing? 'Cause I feel like as a teenager or maybe like middle school up till, I guess around the time of this movie, if you saw an old person who was beloved in a movie, they were gonna die.

[00:28:12] **Isabel:** They died, yeah. It still happens in Disney movies.

[00:28:15] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:28:16] **Audrey:** I think it's an easy way to elicit emotion, right?

[00:28:21] **Laurel:** It's like, "Oh, your grandma's so cool and so understanding, and she loves you both unconditionally! Oh, there she goes."

[00:28:28] **Audrey:** It feels very Pixar.

[00:28:29] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:28:30] **Audrey:** Yeah, not necessary. I feel like there was already enough going on between the pregnancy and the gayness. The grandma didn't need to go, sorry.

[00:28:39] **Isabel:** Oh, I actually have one.

[00:28:40] **Audrey:** Oh, good. Great.

[00:28:41] **Isabel:** Sorry, I forgot about this, but when Wil asks Vivian, she's like, why haven't we met before? And she's like, "We have, when I was seven and you were eight." And you're like, but what about in between? You still didn't answer the question.

[00:28:59] **Laurel:** Right, yeah.

[00:29:00] **Isabel:** Where have you been?

[00:29:02] **Audrey:** Maybe the implication was, they were both so caught up in their respective studies starting at that age.

[00:29:09] **Laurel:** Between like 9 and...for like 20 years!

[00:29:10] **Audrey:** I don't know. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:29:13] **Laurel:** It was, it was a bit of a stretch.

[00:29:14] **Audrey:** I remember that too, yeah. I actually have another kind of little one. It's actually not a criticism at all, but just something I noted, which was, it's so hard to make Joan Chen look frumpy.

[00:29:26] **Laurel:** Oh my gosh, yeah.

[00:29:28] **Audrey:** It's especially notable when she finally does start to dress up and go out on dates. She's just so naturally glamorous that they have to really try hard to make her look not glamorous, you know?

[00:29:39] **Laurel:** Yeah, and also 20 years older than Will, and I don't think they did that successfully. Okay, maybe that's another one of mine is that Joan Chen did not look like her mother.

Oh, but I will say, okay. So on that weird, like "how have we not met before" thing, my first girlfriend and I actually did meet as like...

[00:29:58] **Audrey:** Oh, babies?

[00:30:00] **Laurel:** ...five to seven year olds because our mothers worked together as nurses. And then we got together when we were in like our early 20s, so it's possible.

[00:30:09] **Isabel:** You didn't know each other in between there?

[00:30:11] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah. And it's Guam, so it's pretty small.

[00:30:14] **Isabel:** But did your family always go to Planet China on Fridays?

[00:30:17] **Audrey:** Exactly.

[00:30:17] **Isabel:** 'Cause I don't understand...

[00:30:19] **Audrey:** Did your family go to Planet...Guam or Philippines? Yeah.

[00:30:24] **Laurel:** No, no, they didn't. You're right. You're right. It's inexcusable.

[00:30:25] **Audrey:** I think that's the thing. Yeah, like there's clearly a very tight-knit community, which I actually feel like your story is pretty parallel to that, cuz it is a small, you know, community I'm sure. Planet Nurse, maybe? I don't know, but...the hospital?

Oh, that's cute.

[00:30:42] **Laurel:** Oh, that's true. Okay.

[00:30:44] **Audrey:** All right. Let's get into your juicier ones.

[00:30:46] **Laurel:** Okay. So one of my things with both this film and *The Half of It* is Alice Wu has very particular dialogue quirks. Her characters are almost painfully clever sometimes. This time around, I actually liked some of the jokes more, but I remember the first couple of times I was like, "Ugh, I know that you're trying to like" - There's this one line where Wil and Vivian are in bed, I think. So this was actually a really cute scene. They were having sex and Vivian's mom calls, and it starts to leave a message while they're having sex. And they both just break out laughing because her mom is like, "Oh, maybe she's still there. Okay. I love you. Bye." And then, right, like they're in the middle of it.

And then Wil is like, "You told your mom about us?" And Vivian's like, "Yeah." And she's like, "Does she think we have sex?" And I think Vivian says something like, "No, she thinks we conjugate Latin verbs."

[00:31:45] **Audrey:** Oh, I noted that too.

[00:31:47] **Laurel:** And I was like, "That's fine." It didn't bother me as much this time. There were a couple of things that like -

Ok, so when Wil is trying to set up her mom, she's talking to the nurses and other doctors about setting up her mom and everyone's like, "Oh, I know an older Chinese guy." And then this one, lady's like, "I know an older...Mr. Park." And she's like, "That's Korean! Off the list." And then one of them is like, "Oh, what about Mr. Fu in room 209" or whatever. And Wil's like, "Let me see

the stats. Okay. 53. Unmarried. Thyroid levels aren't where I'd like to see them, but overall pretty healthy. Okay. Ask him if he's free Friday." I thought that was pretty funny. So I think Alice Wu's type of dialogue just kind of has to grow on me, and this time it did.

But I remember during *The Half of It*, the main character was too precociously clever sometimes in her dialogue. So maybe if I rewatched it, I wouldn't feel as salty about it

[00:32:49] **Audrey:** Do you feel like it gets kind of sitcom-y sometimes?

[00:32:52] **Laurel:** A little bit. Yeah. Yeah. I think that's yeah.

[00:32:54] **Audrey:** Yeah. Like you would expect almost like a [*bad-dum-tss drum sound to indicate a joke*] sometimes.

[00:32:58] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

[00:32:59] **Audrey:** Or audience laughing.

[00:33:01] **Laurel:** Right, right. Like, "This is the punchline!" Yeah, I think that's my last one though.

[00:33:06] **Audrey:** Oh really? Okay. I'll just go through my last two. So one of my biggest ones is that as a character, I don't know if this is a criticism - it's again, an observation. I feel like Vivian's actually pretty toxic. So it's sort of hard to buy her as -

[00:33:19] **Laurel:** Oh, interesting. Yeah, yeah.

[00:33:20] **Audrey:** This person that you're rooting for. Right? Because there's a scene where she shows up, Wil shows up late to her birthday party. Which by the way, I also found it hard to believe that Vivian didn't really understand how, the fact that Wil is a surgeon. And Vivian's father is a surgeon, so she should know what's going on with her schedule, right?

[00:33:39] **Laurel:** I read that as her being tired of her - like she's tired of having to deal with having someone who's not actually in her life because she's used to her father not being there, as well. Like when they both sent the same bouquets of flowers.

[00:33:55] **Audrey:** Right. She knew what she was getting herself into though, right? It's like she's dating a surgeon. I think expecting her to not be on call for whatever reason is a lot. I don't know. The thing that I wanted to comment on was so Wil shows up late, very late to her birthday party. And then she says, "Can I come in?"

And then Vivian says, "I'm not sure." So Wil starts to walk away. And then Vivian's like, "That's it?" And I'm like, "What are you doing?" Like that's so - it feels very manipulative to me, you know? Like it feels like a game and I'm like, sure, they're young, they're playing games, but it doesn't make me wanna buy into the relationship.

[00:34:31] **Isabel:** But it actually made me think Wil was not ready for a relationship.

[00:34:36] **Laurel:** Mmm.

[00:34:36] **Audrey:** Oh, I don't think she was. I agree.

[00:34:38] **Isabel:** Vivian was making all the moves for all of it.

[00:34:41] **Laurel:** Mhmm yeah.

[00:34:43] **Isabel:** Like the candy machine, she made the moves. Ballet. Everything she was making the moves. And I felt like Wil was like, "I guess?" You know, like kind enough. She was like, I'm here for it, but not really.

[00:34:55] **Laurel:** Yeah. I can, I can see your point with Vivian being manipulative. I can also see her like waiting for Wil to step up in some way, instead of just like kinda shrugging it off and leaving.

[00:35:10] **Isabel:** Yeah.

[00:35:11] **Audrey:** Absolutely. I think it was the, I'm not sure part.

[00:35:13] **Laurel:** Mm mhmm.

[00:35:14] **Audrey:** I think I've been there where I'm like, you know, where they're not being direct. And so I feel like it's her saying like, "Mmm, no, like you don't deserve to come in" and then Wil walking away. And her being like, "Why aren't you fighting for this?"

[00:35:29] **Laurel:** Why are you walking away?

[00:35:30] **Audrey:** Why are you walking away?

You know? In a way, I like this dialogue because it actually feels really real and probably true to the characters, but it made it a little bit harder for me to really empathize, I guess, with them. But that being said, I agree. I don't think Wil was ready at all for the relationship. And then related, my last big, biggest thing was that for me personally, I just didn't feel like there was enough development in their relationship period - in terms of like what I could see. Because they basically, and I understand why Alice Wu did this, but like she split this movie in half.

[00:36:05] **Laurel:** Right. Yeah.

[00:36:06] **Audrey:** It's a 90 minute movie about two really big things happening in these people's lives. And so for me, from my view as the audience, is I'm seeing these stages and these milestones in Wil and Vivian's relationship that are earned. I just felt like I needed a little bit more there and it could have been a 90 minute movie about them.

[00:36:25] **Laurel:** Mhmm yeah, yeah, yeah. I can see that.

[00:36:28] **Audrey:** But that's it.

[00:36:30] **Laurel:** Cool. Okay.

[00:36:31] **Audrey:** Now into the fun stuff. Oh, it's all fun.

[00:36:34] **Laurel:** Isabel, what's one of the things that you loved about this movie?

[00:36:38] **Isabel:** The end.

[00:36:43] **Laurel:** I love that for both of these.

[00:36:44] **Audrey:** Great answer.

[00:36:47] **Isabel:** When everything is hunky dory.

[00:36:49] **Audrey:** Mhmm.

[00:36:51] **Laurel:** Are you talking about at Planet China or are you talking about the epilogue scene?

[00:36:56] **Isabel:** The very end. I like, I really liked it. Everything kind of came together and kind of closed up neatly.

[00:37:03] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah. As it should, especially for a romcom, for sure.

[00:37:08] **Audrey:** I was just thinking like, that's also one of my favorite things is that no one dies. No one dies.

[00:37:14] **Laurel:** Except the grandma.

[00:37:15] **Audrey:** Oh shit. You're right. Well, okay. No lesbian dies, which is a big deal.

[00:37:17] **Laurel:** That's true. No gays die.

[00:37:19] **Audrey:** Although the grandma could be lesbian. I don't know.

[00:37:20] **Laurel:** That's true, right? Yeah.

[00:37:21] **Audrey:** But then I'm like, wait, would, are there a lot of romcoms where someone dies, but I'm like - they would've figured out how to do it for a lesbian film.

[00:37:29] **Laurel:** Right. Yeah. Yeah. I was like, well, *Happiest Season*. They like shamed them.

[00:37:34] **Audrey:** Oh my god.

[00:37:34] **Laurel:** It's a kind of death. No, you're right. I thought that was really sweet. All of it. I like that Vivian and her mom are now sort of conspiring together a little bit more. The mom's dad is back in their lives. Little Yu, right? That's the guy who impregnated...

Isabel: Young Yu.

[00:37:53] **Audrey:** Little Yu!

[00:37:54] **Laurel:** That's what it was, in one of the subtitles it was "Little Yu".

[00:37:55] **Audrey:** No, no, no. You're right.

[00:37:56] **Laurel:** Lil, I think cuz haha. He's so tall. Right. But he seems like a sweet dad. Yeah. It all came together really nicely. Audrey, what's one of yours?

[00:38:04] **Audrey:** Yeah. I guess for me now on my, you know, third watch as an elder gay or my first watch as an elder gay, I can sort of acknowledge how relatable it was to the point where I actually remember personally having the experience when I was very young of adjusting the TV antenna so my grandpa could watch Peking opera, which is like something that happens in this film.

So just like all these little things that you growing up as a Chinese American, that she represented in this film. It's pretty incredible to see this, you know, especially back in 2004. Like almost 20 years ago.

[00:38:39] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah. To get a, from what I've heard, I'm not Chinese, but like an authentic Chinese representation - but also a gay one is just kind of like what? What a gift. As Isabel mentioned at the beginning. One of my favorite things was when we didn't talk about the cinematography, but I really liked a lot of the shots.

Some of the shots are just gorgeous, right? And then some of the shots are really fun. So one of the ones that sticks out to me is of course, it's the scene of Wil and her mom in the back of the bus, right? Her mom's in a wedding dress. That's such a cool shot. But then also in that same scene, like Joan Chen in a dress, on a bus with that bokeh lighting coming through the window. Just that like, the little spots of light around her is just like, oh my gosh, I have such a crush on Joan Chen. But then also, there were so many fun shots, like when the pregnancy was first getting gossiped around the community and they did this sort of like round table where they got people's reactions. Like it was just like this woman in the frame going, "Oh my gosh, she's pregnant!" And then it would switch to like her husband and he would say something and -

So that was a fun setup, but then they also did when her mom moves in with her and she's going through her fridge - they shoot from inside the fridge. And then there's this other time -

[00:39:59] **Audrey:** Oh, that was good. Yeah.

[00:40:01] **Laurel:** When she like, she's going through the bag of herbs, they shoot from like, inside the bag of, of herbs. I feel like they did a lot of fun things with the cinematography.

That was really, that was really cool.

[00:40:11] **Audrey:** I just read this on Wikipedia, but apparently Alice Wu wanted to get a bunch of sort of establishing shots of New York, but they no longer had the budget for it. Like they couldn't afford those shots for some reason. And so, because I think I'm just connecting the dots here, but they were able to tag onto the filming of *Hitch*, Will Smith's film.

[00:40:27] **Laurel:** Will Smith. Yeah. Right.

[00:40:28] **Audrey:** I'm pretty sure it's related. And get these like helicopter shots. So these like aerial shots of the city. So that was like a cute little fun fact.

[00:40:36] **Laurel:** I mean, if you're working with Will Smith, use Will Smith, right?

[00:40:39] **Audrey:** Exactly.

[00:40:40] **Laurel:** Yeah. I wonder if they named the main character Wil because of, no, I'm kidding.

[00:40:45] **Audrey:** Oh my.

[00:40:46] **Laurel:** Can you imagine? Isabel, what's another one of yours?

[00:40:49] **Isabel:** I really enjoyed the first date scene, actually.

[00:40:53] **Laurel:** Is that the falling one?

[00:40:54] **Isabel:** Yeah. Cause I felt like, I felt like it was real in terms of the buildup with Wil kind of slowly opening up and kind of letting Vivian take control a little bit more. It was exciting.

[00:41:10] **Laurel:** Oh, that was actually one of the other scenes that I thought was a really cute shot too - was when the camera, so they're inside the apartment, and then the camera moves to the outside of the apartment and films them through the window. And then you see Wil collapse to the floor. That was really cute.

[00:41:27] **Audrey:** Yeah, there was, the cinematography was really good. And the editing was pretty clever at points, too. But I was looking up the DP and I feel like he didn't do that much after this.

[00:41:37] **Laurel:** He did *Strangers with Candy*?

[00:41:39] **Audrey:** Oh, the movie or the show? Yeah.

[00:41:43] **Laurel:** Oh the cinematographer, yeah. The show.

[00:41:44] **Audrey:** Oh, random.

[00:41:45] **Laurel:** Which I guess was apparently the first TV show to be filmed in high definition.

[00:41:50] **Audrey:** *Strangers with Candy*? Really? I didn't know that. I was a huge fan of that show and Amy Sedaris.

[00:41:55] **Laurel:** Okay. So it's one of the first high def TV series, which is *Strangers with Candy*.

[00:42:00] **Audrey:** Okay. So I was trying to figure out how to bring this up, but I watched part of *Drunk Lesbians Watch Saving Face* on YouTube. So there's this whole, this whole skit. And it's funny because they're, it's like hosted by these two lesbians who are just like getting drunker and drunk and are watching movies.

But then in the beginning of this one, they pan over, and both of the actors from *Saving Face* are there with them watching this movie. Yeah. I was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, what's going on?" They didn't get drunk. They're just sitting there watching the movie with them.

[00:42:29] **Laurel:** What?

[00:42:29] **Audrey:** Like while the two lesbians are getting drunk.

[00:42:31] **Laurel:** Oh my gosh, that sounds so awkward.

[00:42:33] **Audrey:** It was a little awkward, but I think we should still link to the episode. It's super short. It's like 20 minutes. But the reason I bring it up is because at one point, Lynn Chen mentions that *Saving Face* was one of the last films shot in film, which I don't think is true because like film comes back, right?

Like people are still shooting a film, but I think in terms of it being sort of more mainstream, I guess. So another fun fact that I learned from watching that.

[00:43:01] **Isabel:** Speaking of having them there, I met Lynn Chen once.

[00:43:05] **Laurel:** What? Hey!

[00:43:06] **Isabel:** Like actually not terribly long ago, I guess. She was here for a screening of *Go Back to China*. I don't know if you've seen that.

[00:43:14] **Laurel:** Uh-uh. No.

[00:43:17] **Isabel:** So.

[00:43:18] **Laurel:** I just saw that. Oh, probably cuz I was looking at her IMDB. What's *Go Back to China*?

[00:43:22] **Isabel:** It's with Anna Akana.

[00:43:25] **Laurel:** Uh-huh. Yeah.

[00:43:26] **Isabel:** And it's about somebody's family has a factory, and so she's like there for the summer or whatever. It's pretty good.

[00:43:34] **Laurel:** Oh good. Okay.

[00:43:35] **Isabel:** I think it's on Prime, too.

[00:43:37] **Laurel:** Okay. Nice. So you got to meet her?

[00:43:40] **Isabel:** Oo I told the guy that I knew, who like ran the thing - I was like, "Oh, I'm huge Lynn Chen fan." She's probably the only Asian woman I've had a crush on of celebrity status, right? Like, you know, growing up, it's just -, you know, not knowing anybody really. So he introduced us, and then she was super nice.

And Erin's like, "Do you need to take a picture?" And I was like, "No, I can't like - I'm, I'm not gonna."

[00:44:03] **Audrey:** Oh!

[00:44:03] **Isabel:** I'm not gonna be that super fan. And then she asked me for a restaurant recommendation, which I'm usually super good at, but then I like blanked. She asked for like -

[00:44:13] **Laurel:** No!

[00:44:14] **Isabel:** Vegan gluten free something. And I, we were downtown and I was like, I have no idea.

[00:44:19] **Audrey:** Oh.

[00:44:20] **Laurel:** You should have said, "Gimme your number and I'll text you some recommendations"

[00:44:23] **Isabel:** Dropped the ball.

[00:44:26] **Audrey:** You need Laurel/Cyrano apparently in these scenarios. I think I would've done the same thing. I would've just drawn a blank. Like, no matter what she asked, you know. She was like, "Where's the bathroom?" You're like [*makes confused, unsure noise*].

[00:44:40] **Isabel:** Let me find it with you.

[00:44:42] **Audrey:** Yeah.

[00:44:42] **Laurel:** Well, speaking of which. Oh great. I'm gonna do this. So we started talking about this before we started recording, but hot dogs play an important role in this film. And we thought that was cute, and hot dogs are gonna be our rating system for this film. When hot dogs appeared twice in this movie, how did you react?

It's a weird question.

[00:45:06] **Isabel:** That's their love language.

[00:45:07] **Laurel:** It's hot dogs. Yeah. Hot dogs in the park. I just love that both of you independently decided that hot dogs should be our rating system for this film.

[00:45:14] **Audrey:** Hot dogs are really important to me. And I'm actually kind of regretting that I was wearing a hot dog sweater before I got on this call. And then I changed. I don't know why. I got warm, and then I got cold. And then I don't know what happened. But anyway, scene missing. But, uh, my point is hot dogs.

Yeah. They have a lot of significance in my life. And when I saw the first hot dog in the film - first of all, it kind of comes outta nowhere and it feels like a weird inside joke. Even in the movie, I was very delighted and then it showed up again the second time. And I was like in tears and it's almost like bookends of the film.

Right. Uh, bun-ends.

[00:45:50] **Laurel:** Mhmm.

[00:45:50] **Audrey:** So I think having hot dogs be our rating for this particular film is perfect. So another big like for me was - And we talked about this a little bit in the beginning, but it was just the representation, especially now being an elder Chinese gay, I can appreciate it more than I could back then.

Apparently it's very unusual to see a film like this that not only is like a mostly a Chinese cast, but that is also like maybe more than half in Mandarin.

[00:46:19] **Laurel:** Mhmm. Yeah.

[00:46:20] **Audrey:** And I just wanna point out that there are - there's so few white people. I think there's like one that's notable. And a fun fact about her, this woman whose name that I can't remember that that I probably wrote somewhere.

So the woman I'm talking about is her surgeon friend. Do you know what I'm talking about? Like another doctor who works with her. She plays the lesbian wife of Carol from *Friends*. Do you remember this? So you know, that subplot with Ross, how he has this girlfriend, or maybe they're married, I don't know.

[00:46:54] **Isabel:** Susan.

[00:46:56] **Audrey:** Yes, Susan. But as soon as I saw her, I was like, oh my God, six degrees of lesbian. This came much later after *Friends*, but I'm sure it was somewhat intentional.

[00:47:03] **Laurel:** That's so funny. Her name is Jessica Hecht, Hecheted? H-E-C-H-T. Yeah. Aw, nice. Good catch. The language thing was one of mine, too. I loved that most of the dialogue authentically was in Chinese. I didn't realize until I read the thing on like the Amazon summary that it wasn't all Mandarin, but that's great cuz I feel like with Alli's family, at least, they switch back between Cantonese and Toisan.

[00:47:33] **Audrey:** Oh, wow. Okay.

[00:47:34] **Laurel:** That felt, yeah. I was like, oh cool. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That was one of my bigger things. Isabel, do you wanna do your last one?

[00:47:41] **Isabel:** Yeah. I liked the levity of the mom going to the porn shop.

[00:47:47] **Audrey:** Oh, that's good.

[00:47:48] **Isabel:** And like how her sitting in, you know, in the house inadvertently watching porn, but being very excited about it. It was like, she's the mom in the movie, but it shows that she still has her sexuality, and she's having this baby. Like she's still, you know, young..

[00:48:10] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:48:11] **Audrey:** Oh, that's a good one. Definitely unexpected, but I love it. I can just go ahead and share my last one. Another thing I learned from Wikipedia is that the studio was really pressuring Alice Wu to make both main characters white. They basically saw this as another *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* type film.

And so they were pressuring her to cast someone like Reese Witherspoon as the main character and like Ellen Burstyn as her mother. And then they were willing to make a compromise and asked her to make the love interest, at least, white so they could cast someone like Scar Jo to bring more attention to the film.

But despite all of this pressure, first time writer-director Alice Wu was like, "No. This is gonna be in Mandarin. I'm gonna keep the lesbian romance. And both the characters are gonna be Chinese. And this is non-negotiable. And also I'm gonna direct it and I'm gonna write it." And I just was like blown away.

It's so incredible. Like how often do you hear stories like that? Usually I think the studios get their way, and the fact that she was like probably super young and this was for her first feature film, just totally blew my mind.

[00:49:16] **Laurel:** Yeah. I wonder what that dynamic was like too, cuz you've got Will Smith as a producer, right? And so I wonder if he took a side, you know. And was he like, uh, "You should probably consider this" or if he was like, "No, do the movie that you want." But I guess we'll never know. Yeah. That's cool. It kind of reminds me of *Watermelon Woman*, right? Where, and also *Desert Hearts*. So like you, I guess lesbian filmmakers, just like you make the film you wanna make cuz like *Kiss Me* also did that. Yeah. Yeah. And everyone's like, oh, maybe you should make them younger or straight or white. Yeah.

[00:49:52] **Audrey:** Yeah. I think all the ones that we're talking about, it's like, these are the people who are moving the culture forward. Think about all the films that didn't make it past this point because they compromised, you know?

[00:50:02] **Laurel:** Yeah. Yeah. Ooh. I wonder how many straight romcoms are out there that used to be gay.

[00:50:06] **Audrey:** Oh my God. Well *Happiest Season* for one. Once again, we have mentioned this movie twice.

[00:50:15] **Laurel:** It's not on our checklist. Do not talk about it.

[00:50:17] **Audrey:** Do not talk about *Happiest Season*. This time you brought up first.

[00:50:20] **Laurel:** I know, I know as soon as it came outta my mouth, I was like, "Well, I guess this is gonna be another *Happiest Season* episode."

[00:50:26] **Audrey:** The floodgate's open. Okay. What's your last one?

[00:50:30] **Laurel:** My last one is that I really loved the complexity of all of the characters. I felt like even the dudes, like even the husbands were not, the dad was maybe a little bit flat, but like

there was early on when they were making a joke about they were trying to set Wil up with some dude. And I think Vivian as well.

And they were like, "Oh haha, our husbands are so -". I don't think they said stupid, but I thought that the joke was gonna be that they were just sort of like incompetent dudes, and the wives had been talking about how someone left his wife for someone who was 20 years younger. And then the husbands ended up talking about the same thing.

And I thought that they were gonna be sort of gross about it. Like, "Oh man, lucky guy." And he was like, "Oh my back hurts just thinking about that." And so I feel like a lot of the characters took me by surprise in that way. I felt like Wil's relationship with her mom. Like her mom would be really vibrant and loving sometimes.

And then at other times she would be totally hardheaded, you know, and very stubborn about certain things. You got to see her, and maybe this it's actually mostly Wil's mom, was super complex because you asked to see her in her relationship with her parents and her dad, and how sort of humiliated she felt when her dad found out that she was pregnant.

But then you also got to see her fall in love with that other guy and go through like the dating was so interesting. Man. The more that I'm talking about it, I kind of wish that like Wil's and Vivian's characters had been allowed that much complexity, but she had kind of her own storyline, right? And she was by far the main character in her storyline.

So she got to, I think her character got a lot more airtime in that sense. Versus Wil and Vivian kind of shared their storyline.

[00:52:36] **Audrey:** That's a good point.

[00:52:36] **Laurel:** And so I don't think we got to go in as deep with either of them. But yeah I thought the characterizations were great.

[00:52:44] **Audrey:** You know, that's making me think there were actually sort of three storylines happening at once. There was like the relationship between Vivian and Wil. There was the mom and her situation. And then there was also the mom and Wil.

[00:52:57] **Laurel:** Oh yeah. That's true. That's true. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, totally. Oh man. In 90 minutes!

[00:53:03] **Audrey:** I know, I know. I think it could have been a two hour film, but it's a romcom.

[00:53:07] **Laurel:** Yeah. Huh. Interesting. Cool. Do we want to get into -

[00:53:12] **Audrey:** Yeah. Let's dive into some hot dogs.

[00:53:15] **Laurel:** Okay, great. Yeah. Isabel, let's start with you and Erin though. And I'll pull up Alli's.

[00:53:20] **Audrey:** So out of five hot dogs, how many hot dogs do you give *Saving Face*?

[00:53:25] **Isabel:** We both gave it five hot dogs.

[00:53:29] **Laurel:** Ah, that's yeah. Yeah. Yay. Great. All right. Talk us through that.

[00:53:36] **Audrey:** I think she just did.

[00:53:37] **Laurel:** I okay, great. Yeah. Yeah. Maybe, maybe Erin's at least. I would love to know what Erin thought.

[00:53:44] **Isabel:** Yeah, Erin, I think having seen, especially of the time, the quality of lesbian centered films. You know, they've progressed more recently than not, but the quality of it in terms of relatability and not overly dramatic, not somebody dying. Lesbian main character dying, you know, or anything like that. It was definitely most relatable.

And I think relatability made us like it more.

[00:54:15] **Laurel:** Excellent.

[00:54:16] **Audrey:** Alright Laurel. You and Alli are up.

[00:54:18] **Laurel:** All right. So I gave it four hot dogs. And okay, I'll talk about mine, and then I'll talk about Alli's. I think before I would've given it three, but after this watch, I came around. And I think it was really just the racism. And if I had gotten more of kind of like what you were saying earlier, Audrey - if I had gotten more of Vivian and Wil's relationship, I think it would be closer to a five. But as it is, my rating went up.

So maybe if I watch it again, like I'll give it more.

[00:54:50] **Audrey:** Uh, you'll give it six.

[00:54:52] **Laurel:** Yeah. So Alli gave it a 3.5 hot dogs out a five. So one and a half points for being one of the first lesbian films I ever saw. Nostalgia.

[00:55:03] **Audrey:** Aw.

[00:55:04] **Laurel:** One point for being a Chinese American movie. It felt more relatable to her. One point for being a pretty good movie plot.

And then I guess it's one and a half points off for being - the acting was strange and awkward a lot. But was this a style the director was going for or was it that bad acting? Aw, yeah.

[00:55:28] **Audrey:** Oh, I too am giving it three and a half hotdogs for similar reasons. I think at one point in my life, I probably would've given it one hot dog. So this is a huge upgrade for me. This is all very like subjective, personal reasons. But for me, it gets a partial point knocked off for the sort of casual racism that you mentioned in the tokenization of her black neighbor.

It also gets a little bit of a point knocked off because there's just not enough of the relationship development for me. I also just have a really hard time with romcoms. There are very few other

romcoms I can think of that would even get three hot dogs for me. It's just a hard genre for me. I think this does it well.

And I think it adds enough of, like you mentioned, there is a lot of complexity with characters and it gets a lot of points. Most of that point is just going to the relatability and like the Chinese lesbian representation. Like that's a huge deal

[00:56:18] **Laurel:** Mm. Yeah.

[00:56:19] **Audrey:** Heather's I have not looked at, so I will go ahead and open it.

Saving Face. She gave it four faces. Well, let's convert those to hot dogs.

[00:56:29] **Laurel:** Do faces convert directly to hot dogs?

[00:56:31] **Audrey:** Let me Google that face to hot dog conversion. Um, four faces. "Love the extremely idiosyncratic staging, especially the MTA turnstiles. The vending machine courtship. And Alice Wu's apparent obsession with disrupting weddings." I thought she was gonna dock something for that, but apparently she loves disrupting a wedding.

[00:56:56] **Laurel:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, nice. That's great. Yeah, yeah. I did definitely like the wedding disruption more in *Saving Face* than I did in *The Half of It*.

[00:57:05] **Audrey:** A thousand percent. Yes. This wedding disruption was great.

[00:57:10] **Laurel:** I wish I could articulate why. I did like the audience gasps after every revelation. I thought that was really cute.

I think I just thought the one in *The Half of It* was kind of obnoxious.

[00:57:21] **Audrey:** I think I blocked that out. I honestly can't remember what happened, but I loved the little twist in this one. When you think it's like the father, and it's actually the son.

[00:57:30] **Laurel:** Oh yeah. Oh, that's.

[00:57:31] **Audrey:** That's adorable.

[00:57:32] **Laurel:** That's a good one. And he's like, "No, it's not me!" He looks so shocked. I did forget to mention one thing that I thought was funny. *Saving Face*, right? It's about like her mom's trying to save face on the community and she's trying to save a face with her mom.

The line that kind of mentions it is such a strange line. It's something that her grandpa says to her mom, which is "You have thrown away a lifetime of my face." I was like, "Huh."

[00:58:04] **Audrey:** My Mandarin's very rusty, but there were definitely a few scenes where I was like, "Something is not right with the translation." Like it's actually very off. Um, I don't know, Isabel, if you notice that too, but like my guess is that's what happened.

[00:58:16] **Isabel:** Yeah. No, there were a lot that were not directly translated.

[00:58:20] **Laurel:** Boo.

[00:58:21] **Audrey:** Yeah. Very rough. I wouldn't say rough. I would say like an attempt at a poetic translation or something that was - they should have just translated it literally, I think.

[00:58:29] **Laurel:** Yeah. Good. Cuz if we're talking about units of face, like how many - a lifetime of my face is how many hot dogs, right?

[00:58:38] **Audrey:** A lifetime of my face is how many hotdogs? Wow.

[00:58:41] **Laurel:** So it's like 2000 hot dogs is one lifetime of face. No, I'm kidding. I don't know. It's like a ton, a ton of face. Anyway.

[00:58:50] **Audrey:** This is really spiraling. Um, and I'm, I'm here for it cause I love hot dogs. So. I think it's time.

[00:58:59] **Laurel:** Let's do it.

[00:59:00] [*Noise of a vault opening.*]

[00:59:02] **Audrey:** It's time to take Isabel into the Sapphic culture vaults. [*Walking noises.*]

And make sure we don't accidentally leave her there like the last person.

[00:59:19] **Laurel:** Oh no, that's right. Sorry.

[00:59:21] **Audrey:** It's okay. There are plenty of granola bars and -

[00:59:25] **Laurel:** Gay bars. There are lesbian bars in there.

[00:59:28] **Audrey:** There are lesbian bars there as well. Yes.

[00:59:30] **Laurel:** Granola and lesbians.

[00:59:31] **Isabel:** Not a bad place to be stuck. Yeah.

[00:59:33] **Laurel:** We have all the bars.

[00:59:36] **Audrey:** So Isabel, what have you decided to put in the Sapphic culture vaults?

[00:59:42] **Isabel:** I want to say a carabiner.

[00:59:46] **Laurel:** Ooh.

[00:59:47] **Isabel:** Not used for climbing.

[00:59:53] **Audrey:** This is great. I was like, wait, have we put that in there before? It feels like it should be there. So I'm so glad that you are putting a carabiner in the vault.

[01:00:00] **Laurel:** Thank you. Yeah.

[01:00:02] **Isabel:** It is very me. And like, I just put like my wallet in my pocket and my mom swears that she knew I was a lesbian because I didn't carry a purse. So my mom agrees.

[01:00:16] **Laurel:** That's great.

[01:00:17] **Audrey:** That's good. Alright. Love it. Good entry.

[01:00:20] [*Transition music plays.*]

[01:00:25] **Laurel:** Alright. Did our discussion of *Saving Face* spark any new thoughts or feelings for you? You can post a comment about it on Instagram. We're on Instagram as @SapphicCultureClub. You can tweet your opinions at us at @SapphicPodcast. Or you can email us at sapphiccultureclub@gmail.com.

[01:00:44] **Audrey:** Isabel. Is there a place that you would like to be found if people would like to find you.

[01:00:49] **Isabel:** No. Don't look for me

[01:00:53] **Audrey:** Okay.

[01:00:54] **Isabel:** Or look for me on *Working Classy*.

[01:00:56] **Laurel:** Yay. You can find *Working Classy* at @working_classy on Instagram, and you can email *Working Classy* at workingclassyshow@gmail.com.

[01:01:06] **Audrey:** Lastly, you can find a link to the episode transcript, and links to other things we've mentioned in the description of the episode wherever you're listening to this podcast. Thank you so much, Isabel, for joining us.

[01:01:18] **Laurel:** Thank you.

[01:01:19] **Isabel:** Thanks for having me.

[01:01:21] **Audrey:** I feel like we are really powerful as this triumvirate of -

[01:01:24] **Laurel:** Sapphic Asian club.

[01:01:25] **Audrey:** Yeah. Sapphic Asian Club. And we will talk to you next time when we discuss, I think probably *The Handmaiden*?

[01:01:34] **Laurel:** Is that next? Oh wow. Back-to-back Asians. Back-to-back Sapphic Asians.

[01:01:38] **Audrey:** Back-to-back Sapphic Asians. Yep. That's right. Alright. See you next time. Bye.

[01:01:45] **Laurel:** Bye.

[01:01:46] **Isabel:** Bye.

